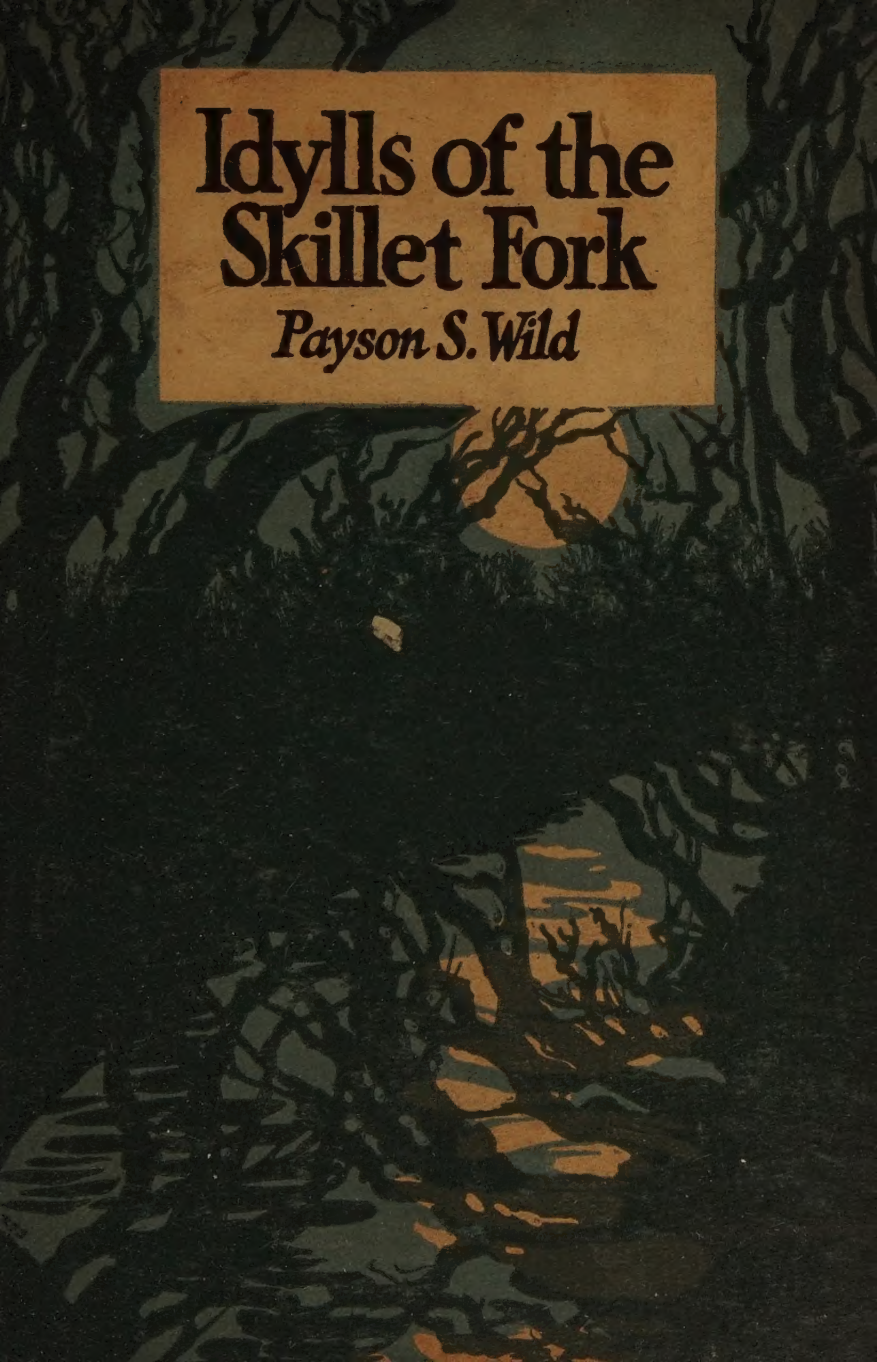
Idylls of the Skillet Fork

Payson S. Wild

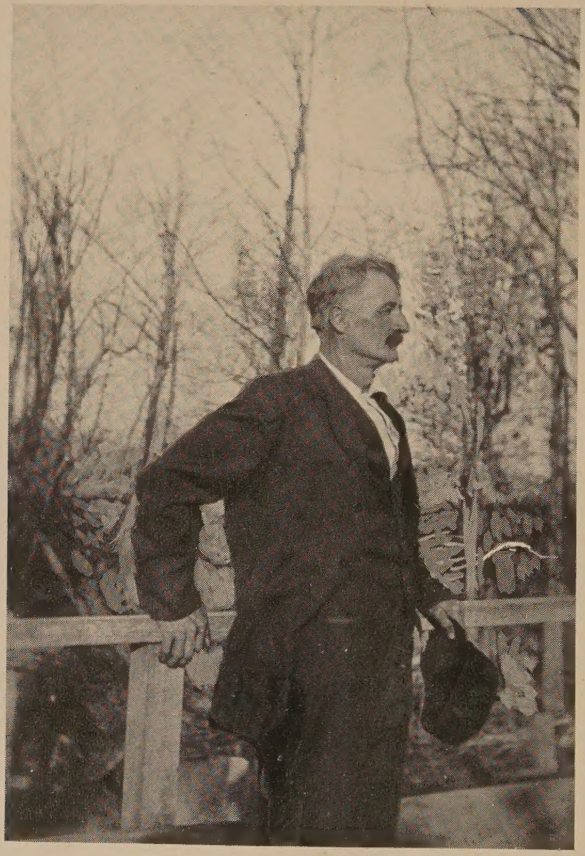


January 19, 1919.

Miss Katherine Norton

Chicago

TO
THE PRESIDING SPIRIT
(IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING)
HEREIN CALLED
"BILL"
OF
SKILLET FORK FARM
ON THE BORDERS OF
"EGYPT"



"Bill"

Idylls of the Skillet Fork

by

Payson S. Wild

Ralph Fletcher Seymour
Chicago

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Ralph Fletcher Seymour

Foreword

Twenty-two of these Bucolics have appeared from time to time during the last three years in "A LINE O' TYPE OR TWO" of *The Chicago Tribune*. For permission to reprint them here I am indebted to the genial "Conductor."

P. S. W.

Chicago, November, 1918.

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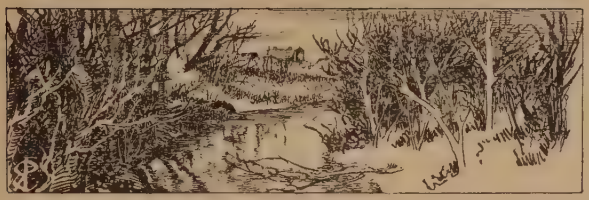
Say, Bill, ef I've cast sparrergrass at yew
In this 'ere book, ye needn't think it's trew;
Fer yew air jes' 's yer be from day ter day
In spite o' what us foolin' fellers say.



IDYLLS OF THE SKILLET FORK

I

The Skillet

I RECK'N yew've never saw the Skillet?
Wal, ye-e-es, they's likelier streams;
But when ye git ri' daown to 't, stranger,
It kind o' hants yer dreams.

It pokes along through grayish bottoms,
An' 's crookeder then worms,
An' the water's sometimes green an' scummy,
An' full o' things thet squirms.

All kinds o' logs an' sticks an' driftin's
Hez here an' thar got grounded,
An' almos' everything thet's in it
Looks 'zac'ly like 't was drownded.

Fokes yuseter say it's jes' thet crooked
Yew couldn't cross the crick
'Thout findin' yew was whar ye started—
But thet's lay'n 't on tew thick.

I wan' ter tell ye tho' they's somepin'
'Bout this 'ere Skillet "river"
Right naow in Aprul time thet gives ye
A reel poetic shiver.

Them gums an' water-oaks an' hick'ries,
Thet grows along its aidges,

Is jes' alive with leafy swellin's,
  Fur Spring's a-keep'n' 'er plaidges!

Yer see thet sassafras a-greenin',
  Them voylets peekin' at yer,
Thet bunch o' pinkish blows a-leerin'
  Jessif they'd like ter bat yer?

An' birds! I never heerd sich music,
  Nor seen sich ri'tous colors,
From "Peter-birds" to larks an' card'nals,
  An' sparrers brown ez crullers.

Sa', jevver hear o' "cats"? I've saw 'em
  Git ketched in that thar crick;
I'd tell ye haow 'f I knowed ye'd b'lieve me—
  They dew it awful slick.

Yew jes' wade in—not seein' nothin',
  'Cos all the water's yaller—
An' then ye feel in 'raound the mud-holes
  Whar 't's nice an' warm an' shaller.

'F a "cat" 's to home yew tech 'im gentle,
  An' sort o' stroke his flank;
Then suddint like yew grab his collar,
  An' sling 'im ont' the bank!

* * * * *

Yew've mebbe never saw this "river"?
  Thar is, p'r'aps, likelier streams;
But when ye git ri' daown to 't, stranger,
  It right smart hants yer dreams.

II

The Bootleg Gang at Sims'

YEP, Egyp's dry; 'z a gin'ral rule
They ain't much doin' in likker;
Saloons is skurce 'z a breedin' mule,
An' shy 'z a nestin' flicker.
But fokes kin git it—"bootleg stuff"—
An' hev a reel good souse,
Tho' most o' them that does it 's tough,
An' allers startin' rows.

Onct down ter Sims', so people tell,
A bunch o' pickled runts
Raised sev'ral kinds o' p'tic'lar cain
An' pulled some rowdy stunts.
Now 'Mersion 's pop'lar thar ter Sims',
Some 'd ruther hev 't than eatin's;
More 'n half the fokes sings Baptis' hymns
An' goes ter all the meetin's.

Wal, they jes' give 'emselves a hunch
An' got the law behind 'em;
The sheriff rounded up the bunch,
An' Jestice Herford fined 'em.
This made the boozers awful sore;
They'd git thet Baptis' goat!
So fer a week they planned an' swore
An' kep' their scheme remote.

Then suddint like one Sart'day night
They took a hoss 't hed died
(They 'lowed it wan't no pleasant sight),
An' lugged it right inside
The Baptis' church 'ithout a sound,
An' cut it all ter bits,
Which they throwed ever'whar around,
A-laffin' mos' ter fits.

It seems like sackerlege or libel,
But fac's is allers fac's;
Thet hoss'es head laid on the Bible,
All bludjunned with a ax.
The sexton cleaned the mess some way,
An' services was held;
But no one hed no word ter say—
Jes' prayed an' sang an'—smelled.

The foll'rin' week some roughneck pup
Shet caows up in the church;
Which kind o' het the members up—
Enough ter start a search.
But nothin' doin' till one dark night
Thet rummy boozin' crew
Blowed up the church with dynamite,
An' then lit aout an' flew.

Say, jevver see a Baptis' *hot*,
Not Christyun hot but human?
The kind thet kin, jes' 's easy 's not,
Coagerlate albewman?
That's what they was, jes' reg'lar hellers;
No more o' heapin' coals!
They swore they'd jug them bootleg fellers
'F it cost their mortal souls.

They done it tew. Some tracks they seen
They kivered up with pails;
'N' a coupl' o' "bloods" thet wasn't green
Was sicked upon the trails.
They chased the bums ter Hick'ry Run,
An' thar the Baptis's tarred
An' feathered ev'ry doggone one,
An' chucked 'em under guard.

Them boys is crackin' stun terday;
A new church stan's in Sims',
An' now in peace they watch an' pray
An' sing their Baptis' hymns.

* * * * *

Yep, Egyp's dry; 'z a gin'ral thing
The toughs don't dast ter dicker
With enny kind o' Baptis' ring—
Leastways when 't comes ter likker.

III

The Mocking Bird

I WAS drinkin' in the glory on a day
Late in May,
Feelin' dreamy an' delishus, like a chick'n,
When she's pick'n
Tiny pebbles out o' gravel, or a-fluffin'
An' a-puffin'
All her feathers in a sunny nest o' dust;
An' I cussed

Sich a foolish world fer sweatin' an' a-swinkin',
An' a-thinkin'
Thet a feller hez ter rustle an' be snappy
Tew be happy.
'T was a nawful loafy mornin'—tell ye thet—
An' I set
Watchin' ev'ry livin' critter feel 'is oats.
My, them shoats!

Say, yew'd orter heerd 'em gruntin' an' a-crunchin'
An' a-munchin',
Jessif nuthin' ever mattered in their creed
'Ceptin' feed.
An' the pidjuns was a-cooin' quite aloof
On the roof;
Thar was hosses, thar was heffers, thar was steers,
Chanticleers,

Perky hens, an' turkey cocks, an', 'pon my word,
Ev'ry bird
Thet I ever seen or heerd of—all a-croakin',
An' a-soakin'
In ol' Feebus' dazzlin' rajunce— all a-eatin'
An' a-tweetin'—
Jim'ny Crickets, Holy Kittens! Dew ye wonder
Now, by thunder,

'T I was glad ter jes' be livin' on the earth?
W'y, 't was worth
All the sorrer, all the pain 't I ever had,
'T was, by gad!
But I gotta tell ye suthin' 't 'appened then;
Ever b'en
Whar a mockin'-bird was tunin' up 'is fiddle?
It's a riddle

How 'e symfonizes ev'ry sort o' noise
An' employs
A composer's subterfujes (ez ye've noted)
Single throated.
Wal, I seen one settin' up thar (knowed 't was him)
On a limb
Of a deadish kind o' ellum, 'n' I could tell
Jes' ez well

'T 'e was cockyer than a roarin' swearin' pirate
By the high rate
He was thrashin' o' them wings o' his, an' tail
Like a flail.
First I tho't I was a-list'nin' tew a martin
Sure for sartin;
Then a blue-jay almos' give me 'n awful shock
With 'is squawk;

I was jest a-gittin' used ter hearin' that bird,
When a cat-bird
Started in ter yowl an' sputter, julluk Tabby
When she's gabby;
Then some swallers, chickadees, an' whippoorwills
Give me thrills,
An' I tell ye I was altergether foozled,
Jes' bamboozled,

Ez I watched that clever cynnic keep a-rockin'
An' a-mockin',
Till at last he got so bubbly full o' fizz
Thet 'e riz
Off thet lonely perch o' his'n right up square
Int' the air,
Still a-swingin' an' a-singin' in 'is revel
Like the devil!

Then 'e come ri' down agin an' hit the spot
Whar 'e'd sot;
Hadn't lost a single note—jes' kep' 'er goin'
'S if he's mowin'.

* * * * *

Dew ye reckon I'll fergit thet garrylus
Little cuss?
Wal, ye got anuther "reckon" comin' then—
Mebbe ten.

IV

The Siren

THEY'S a hull snarl o' potes hez driveled 'bout
Joon
With its leefyness, freshness an' greenth;
'N' if I was anuther, I s'pose—which I ain't—
I'd be the four umpty an' steenth.

Ez regards ter the Skillet—wal, pardner, b'leeve
me,
It's right in its prime, buggosh;
Yew kin talk all yer wanter, it's fine ter jes'
sawnter
An' look at ol' Nacher a-slosh.

I was thar spell ago—druv sixteen mile
With Bill an' a load o' soy beans;
An' I swar ter the Dooce thet I never hed knowed
Afore what *greenin'* means.

Be'n a-rainin' like sin, but hed then faired up
An' the sky was julluk a gentian;
I ain't never knew sich a hevvenly blue,
Ef ye'll 'low me in passin' ter mention.

The river was full, plum full ter the top,
A matter o' thirty odd feet,
An' the water hed backed ont' the bottoms right
smart,
But was dreenin' off fast with the heat.

'Twas a sarpent o' choc'lit a-rithin' an' twistin'
Ri' down a arborial tunnel;
An' Bill 'e sez, "Naow, ef we hed a ol' scaow,
We could flote ter Noorleans thru a funnel!"

But the way them fiel's was enjoyin' thersel's!
They was fairly yellin' with glee;
I reckon I must 'a' be'n pretty high keyed,
An' I tell ye it jes' got me.

I kind o' suspishun Bill heerd suthin' tew,
Fer a exstasy hit 'im like pain;
It looked like fer sure he was feelin' the lure
O' the siren thet sings after rain.

V

Laury at the 'Phone

WILL'S drove ter Keene's fer 'nockerlated seed;
Queer, ain't it, 'bout thet nitrigin—*Down Rover!*
Will sez we git mos' twict ez much o' feed
Fer growin' them thar teeny warts on clover. . .

Uh huh . . . We're limin' tew; Will sez the sile
Hez soured bad an' needs a "alkali" . . .
I do' know what 'tis—never heerd it—I'll
Ax him; on sich like words I'm kind o' shy. . .

Malviny? Reely? Throwed anuther fit?
Yew better call, I reckon, Docter Mott;
Seems like she's gittin' old enuff ter quit—
Will sez he 'lows it's jes' plain fits she's got.

Our Duroc "Iphijeny" 's littered . . . eight . . .
Jes' walkin' cherries! My, but how they'll grow!
Will's figg'rin' now on what'll be the'r weight
Come Fall; he sez our corn's a-runnin' low. . .

D'yew say it's yaller? Prob'ly got "damp feet";
Will sez alfalfy'll do thet when't's tew wet . . .
The way it gits ter rain *is* hard ter beat;
But then, Will sez it ain't no use ter fret. . .

No, couldn't go las' night—set up fer Nell;
Vern Rowell druv 'er out—seemed like all night;
'Twas nine afore they come . . . He means reel well,
But Will he sez the Rowells ain't quite right. . .

She *was?* She's led the singin' awful good;
I never tho't she'd be baptized; Will sez—
O Willie! Git right off!—He's clum the wood
Pile; that 'ar' way he'll *fall*—Lan' sakes, he ***hez!***

Four Mile Creek

VI

The 'Possum Hunt

"FOUR MILE" was jes' kind o' googlin' along
(It ketches the Skillet in "Thirty-three"
Whar the woods is thick an' the moon ain't strong,
An' the 'possum hides in a holler tree);
'T was shimmerin' thar all gold an' bright
Ez we loafed threw the medder thet Awtum night.

We'd et a light supper—sow belly, corn bread,
Pickled beets, fried eggs an' two kinds o' pie—
When Bill, sort o' cazuel, shoved back an' said,
A-squintin' aloft at a perfec' sky:
"'S a pretty good night fer coons; so still
Yer kin hear yer heart when yer've clum up hill."

I sensed what he meant, so I flaxed around,
An' in less 'n no time we was out on the trail.
Bill's houn' dawg, ol' Jess, was sniffin' the ground
Pertendin' tew ax, "Is it 'possum or quail?"
Tho' she knowed well enough thet a Hunter's Moon
Don't never mean nuthin' 'cept 'possum or coon.

I've heerd tell o' moonlights on earth here an' thar,
In Venice, an' down in ol' Rome's Colyseum;

But gim *me* the light of our lunary star
When dew turns ter di'monds in Frost's jubi-
leum;
When the 'simmons is ripe, an' not a leaf stirs,
An' the fiel's is jes' drownded in silvery blurs!

We was strollin' 'long "Four Mile" when suddenly
Jess
With a sharp, quick yelp shot off threw the bresh.
Jehosaphat, pard, I gotta confess
How a houn' dawg's tonguin' will quicken the
flesh!
For over a hour me 'n Bill snook along,
An' never got tired o' foll'rin' thet song.

She was pawin' a tree when we seen 'er at last,
A-yelpin' an' whinin' jessif she's possessed.
'T was a gum, thick an' solid, an' big ez a mast,
An' 'fore I could speak Bill was down tew 'is
vest.
Some chopper is Bill, an' I sure never seen
A tree cut cleaner—nor ha'f ez clean.

All shiny an' white like a human kid
Thet 'possum looked when we hauled 'er out!
I felt like 't was murder, I suttenly did,
But Bill 'e sez, "Now, keep a eye on 'er snout;
She'll ac' 'z if she's daid ez long ez it's curled,
An' don't ye leggo of 'er—not fer the world."

* * * * *

When we reached "Four Mile" we sed down ter
rest,
Completely bewitched by thet orb in the West.
We was talkin' 'bout Injuns, an' *seein'* 'em tew,
When I noticed, by jing, that 'ar 'possum hed
blew!

VII

Jupiter

FEW months ago, I 'member well, me'n Bill
Was settin' by the cattle wat'rin'-trough
A-lis'nin' tew the steers thet skwudged around
The muddy yard an' chawed the'r cuds an' sighed.
A bunch o' smallish hogs hed quit the'r rootin'
An' packed the'rsel's up close agin the fence,
An' yew'd 'a' laft ter hear 'em goin' ter sleep.
Ef one the runts was squeezed a mite tew much
By 'nother layin' on 'im kind o' hard,
He'd snort an' squeal ter beat a callioap,
Then shove the bunch aside an' wiggle out,
An' give 'em fits, an' then go 'long an' plunk
His carcuss on some other one; an' then
We'd git the hull dum show all over 'gin.

Wal, me an' Bill was watchin' on 'em quar'l
An' slowly qui'tin' down. 'T was one them nights—
Yew've saw 'em, co'se, ef yew was country raised—
A leetle tinge o' red left in the west,
When yew kin still set out without a coat,
An' yit yer sort o' glad when yew come in
An' find the lamp's het up the room. Yew felt
Thet Fallish dreaminess thet ain't like May's,
When Nacher's takin' off 'er overalls,
But ain't quite done with cleanin' up the ruck.

We got a-talkin' speckerlatish like,
'N' I sez, a-lookin' up t' them milyun stars,
"I bet ye, Bill, they's farms on Jupiter,"
An' Bill 'e sez, "I've offen thought o' that."

An' then he started in an' reeled it off
Jessif he's readin' po'try outen books:
"A Jovial Spring," he sez (his very words),
"Mus' last fer mos' three years, an' Fall the same.
Jes' think o' havin' apple blows, or 'simmons,
All 't once that long! But then yer'd hev ter plow
An' harrer tew fer three four years 't a stretch;
Things 'd even up about the same, I reckon...
Eight kinds o' moonlight thar, Jehosaphat!
Wonder'f thet means eight kinds o' moonshine tew!
An' whadyer' spose it dooz ter lovers, potes,
An' bayin' houn' dawgs——" "O Bil-l-l! Ain't ye com'n?"
'T was Laury callin' 'im. She never knowed
How much she pestered Bill. "Le's gwin," he sez.

VIII

Laury's Lullaby

ALL day I'd b'en a-cuttin' wheat
In the drippin'est kind o' heat,
While Bill he'd drug the road right smart
An' hed made what he called a start
Out on the forty west the silos
(On the road leadin' down to Milo's).
We both was watchin' th' evenin' star,
Sort o' smokin' an' dozin' thar,
When Laury's voice begun ter croon
With the follerin' drowsy toon:

Sleep O, Willy bright!
The whip-poor-will's pleadin',
But mommy ain't heedin',
Fer Willy aint needin'
No beatin' ternight.

Hushaby, Willy wise!
Tree-frogs is a pipin',
An' dad's gone a-snipin',
While mommy's a-wipin'
Yo' pore little eyes.

O bye Willy bye!
The screech-owl's a-screechin',
The veery's beseechin',
An' mommy feels meachin'
Ter hear Willy cry.

In the chimly they's chitt'rin'
An' twitt'rin' an' litt'rin',
Sleep O, sleep O, Willy wee;
Fer the swallers is cheepin'
An' peepin' an' sleepin'—
That's whar Willy wee orter be.

On 'is little bed O,
With nary dread O,
An' a milk-weed puffy
Fer 'is coverlet fluffy,
Hushaby, hushaby, Willy O;

An' 'is piller a gossam-
Y blow from the blossom
Thet floats from a thistle
Whar tralaloos whistle—
Hushaby, hushaby, Willy O!

* * * * *

Next mornin' 't breakfas' Bill aver'd:
"Wal, I reckon thet tralaloo bird
Was mos' tew much fer yew an' me;
Did ye know it was ha'f pas' three . . ."
"Shet up," I sez. O' co'se I knew,
'Cos my clo'es was jes' soaked with dew!

IX

Bill Non-Committal

I S'POSE all farmers gits thet way in time,
An' I don't wonder; it's enough ter make
Perfesh'nal prophits feel onsartin like.
I mean the everlastin' buckin' up
Agin ol' Nacher an' the elemunts
Year in, year out, ontil ye wouldn't sw'ar
'T ye've got 'ny oats at all, f'r exampel, even
When cut an' thrashed an' layin' in the bin;
Yew know thet somp'n still kin spile thet crop.
'F a farmer wants ter gamble, he don't hev
Ter speckerlate on 'Change; I should say not;
Jes' let 'im farm it, plain an' orn'ry farm it—
Thet's all he's gotta dew. I'll bet ye'n less
'N a fortnit he'd be plum dead sure 't 'is chances
Fer buy'n' a kerosene kerridge playin' faro
Was ten ter one agin the farmin' game.
Naow jes' consider what the farmer's got
Ter fight; they's tew much rain or not enough;
'F 'e 's got a crick, 't will overflow an' drownd
'Is corn, or else 't will be a ditch o' dust;
An' then they's ev'ry bug in all helnation
A-eatin' off his truck an' animuls;
They's lightnin', winter-killin', rust, an' smut,
An' wind — 'd yew ever see one them black twisters
Come rippin' down an' shave the ten foot silage
Right off a eighty slick's a whistle? I hev.
It's one the grandes', weerdes' sights on earth,

But hell on farmin'. Yew cain't blame a farmer
'F 'e aint quite sure thet death an' taxes might
Not leave 'im be. Mos' farmers won't commit
The'rsel's on nothin' 't all, an' ain't they right?
The trooth on't is, they don't jes' 'zac'ly know
The'r soul's the'r own, an' Bill he's that 'a' way.

I never seen a feller thet could git
Away with sech a everlastin' lot
O' beatin' round the bush an' dodgin' 's Bill.
W'y, he aint sure o' heaven or hell, or enny
O' them things fokes knows mostly all about.
'F I ast 'im if they's "cats" in Four Mile, "Wal,"
He'd say—an' mebbe Laury'd jes' be'n cleanin'
A mess he'd ketched thet day—"they git 'em thar,
So I've heerd tell, but I dunno's they is,
An' dunno *as* they is." An' when I 'low
It looks right smart like rain, Bill squints aroun'
An' sez he shouldn't wonder whether 't did
Or not. An' when he's stuck a pig, an' Willy,
A-lookin' on with bulgin' baby eyes,
Sez breathless, "Paw, 's 'e daid?"—all Bill kin
say's,
"Wal, I suspishun so; he'd orter be."

I ast 'im onct 'f 'e tho't th' alfalfy'd ketch.
He spit an' picked a blade o' grass an' et it.
"Seems like 'f we hed a shower o' rain, an' then
A warmish spell thet didn't run ter drouth,
No killin' frost or long wet rainy days,
An' 'f Lon mixed in thet fosfate half way right,
An' all thet 'nockerlatin' 's enny good,
An' 'f luck should kind o' come our way a bit,
Thet air alfalfy'd mebbe make a start."
I knowed jes' much then 'zif I hedn't ast.

One time a mule kicked Bill squar' on the jaw.
He seen it comin'—hed no chance ter dodge.
He laid in bed a week afore he woke,
An' staid thar 'nother nursin' up 'is face.
A few days later meetin' that 'ar mule
Bill sez, a-shak'n' 'is finger playful-like,
" 'F I knowed fer sure 't was yew thet done this 'ere,
I reck'n I might git mad, but I dunno,"
An' han's the graynose cuss a fresh pulled carrot.
That's Bill all over. Fifty years o' playin'
The game agin the god o' Luck hez made
'Im jest a leetle guarded in 'is speech,
An' l'arned 'im how ter take 'is dose 'thout squealin'.

X

Laury's "Eats"

"IT'S quarter t' five," Bill hollers; yew sigh an' mutter "Gosh!"
An' jes' slide int' yer overhalls an' shirt;
It ain't much use ter bother with try'n' ter take a wash,
F'r in ha'f a hour yew'll be jes' 's bad fer dirt.
Yew're ou' the barn 'n a jiffy a-feedin' Ball an' Belle,
An' rubbin' up ol' Zilfy's battered hide;
Yew're like a tired enjin', 'cos yer didn't sleep right well,
But say—that breakfas' waitin' thar inside!

It's wonderful what eatin' will dew ter set ye right;
It's one the things 'bout farmin' 't nothin' beats;
Yew get all riled fer sweatin' 'ithout a break in sight,
But—yew fergit it when it's time fer eats.
Now toast an' egg an' coffee's 'bout all the av'rage feller
Kin eat fer breakfas' in a swelt'rin' town;
But gosh all blinkin' blazes, yew ain't no clerk nor teller,
Yew gotta hev reel feed, an' wash it down.

So in yew go t' the kitchen, a room o' quite some size;
Yew grab a cheer an' haul it up t' yer place;
Matildy 'n' Sophy 's servin', while Laury fans the flies,
An' Bill he mumbles thru a form o' grace.
I wish thet I was able ter dew Bill's Laury jestice,
An' tell the diff'runt things she's set afore ye;
But I'm ez fer from doin' thet 'ar ez east from west is,
'N' I suttenly hev no desire ter bore ye.

But ennyhow jes' listen: Pertaters mashed an' wavy;
A bowl of yeller butter thick an' creamy;
A plate o' spicy sassage with eggs fried in the gravy,
An' chicken fricaseed, all hot an' steamy;
A dish o' gravied dumplin's, an' one o' beans an' corn—
Thet suckertash o' Laury's hits me hard!
Her pickled beets is wonders, her slaw fresh ez the morn,
Her passnips sweeter 'n frankinsense an' nard.

An' then they's jams an' jellies, a fluffy heap o' bread,
Hot corncake tew, 'f yew want it—which yew dew;
A leaf o' curly lettis, or, if yew wish, a head;
An' unyons raw, or peppered in a stew.
An' when yew've et thru this 'ere a time or tew or so,
An' drunk three cups o' coffee 'thout a sigh

(Ye never know it's chic'ry, an' ye never need ter
know),
Then, by the Great Lord Harry, comes the pie!

Two kinds at Laury's allers, an' a hunk o' cheese
with it,
An' top it off with do'nuts, milk, an' cake;
Bill passes yew a teethpick, yew settle back a bit,
An' reely think yew're gittin' wide awake.
Wal, ye need thet kind o' fuel, 'cos farm work's
tur'bel grillin',
On freezy days or in a b'ilin' heat;
It ain't farm life or workin', ez mos' fokes thinks,
is killin'—
It's when ye cain't git all ye want ter eat!

XI

Bill on Seth Watts

SETH WATTS hed died, an' Bill was tellin' us
Suthin' about 'im. Bill he'd be'n a bearer 't
The funerel, an' now hed jes' got home,
Hung up 'is Sunday clo'es an' derby hat,
And on the way out tew the thrashin' enjin'
Paid tribute to Seth's mem'ry. "Me an' him
Hed deakin'd it up thar t' our church"—he
jerked
His head toward town—"for twenty years ter-
gether.
A right smart moodish feller Seth was, no
Mistakin' thet; I've offen saw 't myself
An' heerd 'is naybers tell. Some mornin's he
Would git up with a feelin' he must jes'
Be let alone an' not be ast ter dew
One solitary thing by ennyone,
No matter who. He tried Almiry (that's
Mis' Watts) more'n she'd let on. I reckon tho'
She didn't git ter onderstand him 's much
She might; 'f she'd left 'im be ontil he come
Around hisself, they'd both 'a' be'n all right;
A hour or two o' sleep would fixt 'im up.
But 'stid o'thet she 'peared ter feel a call

Ter hev him dew a reg'ler mess of chores
On them 'ar mornin's. Wal, he'd stew an' sw'ar,
An' kick the dawg, an' onct he said he's goin'
Ter quit an' jes' go off—but knowed he wouldn't.
Almiry'd cry an' Seth would cuss, an' then
They'd shet the'r lips an' never say a word
Fer mebbe quite a spell, when suthin' funny
(It might 'a' be'n most ennything) would up
An' happen; Seth would snort, Almiry'd giggle,
An' thet would end his moodin'. That 'ar way
O' doin' 's a hull lot better, 'pears ter me,
Then fer a man ter never hev no chanct
Ter hev a mood, 'f 'e wants ter, 'n know 't will prob'ly
Work out all right somehow."

Bill stopped a minnit,
'N'I seen 'im kind o' turn an' look 't the house,
An' knowed what he was thinkin' better'n if
He'd said it plum ri't out. His crows-feet showed
Up awful plain. Bimeby I seen 'im grin:
"I s'pose yew've noticed lots o' fokes, when one
The fambly's daid, sez funny things about
'Im—funny 'cos yew knowed the one diseased
Yerself, an' seen right thru their line o' talk.
I like ter weigh fokes on a human scale,
Daid or alive. It ain't onkind ter size
'Em up fer what they was, onless they's jes'
Plain or'n'ry trash, an' then it ain't wuth w'ile;
I'd ruther keep my mouth shet 'n' let 'em go.

But reely human fokes thet hez good p'ints
An' bad all mixed tergether—like Seth was—
I cain't see why we try ter make 'em out
Ez hevin' be'n perfecshun; 'tain't the trewth.
I heerd Almiry 'smornin' 'fore the fun'rel
Say this ter one the naybers thar, sez she:
'Seth never said no ha'sh or hasty word
In all 'is life ter me,' an' bust out cry'n'.
Jest then she ketched my eye—I dunno how
It was, I reck'n she sensed the laff inside
O' me, 'n' we both looked over t' whar Seth laid—
She knowed me 'n' Seth was purty clost—'n' I'm sure
She ha'f expected he would set ri't up
An' look at her, fer he could never stand
Fer no Saphiry stuff, 'n' Almiry knowed it.
She quit her takin' on, an' carr'd herself
So ca'm but wownded like, it made me swaller.
I wouldn't give a dam"—his minister
Sez Bill kin carry off those kind o' words
The niftiest he ever heerd fer deakins—
"Fer enny man 'bout who thet pious kind
O' rot might possibly be trew. They ain't
Sich people nohow, leastways not in this
'Ere Skillet deestric'. . . Wal, boys, here we be."

XII

The Katydid

SKEETERS pest'rin',
Bites a-fest'rin',
Merc'ry ninety-four;
Feelin' groggy,
Piller soggy,
Makes me tur'bel sore.

Rollin', groanin',
Tossin', moanin',
Hotter 'n eggs a-fryin';
Houn' dawg yellin',
Jack-ass hellin',
Little Willy cryin'.

Nerves a-tingle;
Ev'ry single
Nightish critter tootin';
Hosses champin',
Cattle stampin',
Even stars a-shootin'!

Air is deader
Than a medder
Whar they's be'n a fire
East all smoky,
Moon-rise poky—
Julluk out o' mire.

Night's a horrer;
Like ter borrer
Bill's ol' "make-'em-peep;"
Shoot the dam things
So's ter ca'm things—
Git fi' minnits' sleep.

Nature's planned it
Tho, 'n' I'll stand it—
'Cept one thing, by hellum!
That's thet rawcus
Hoppin' jaw-cuss
Out on yender ellum.

Pesky thing
Doosn't sing;
Line o' talk
'S jist a squawk.
Rubs its wings an'
Thinks it sings an'
Knocks my wits
All ter bits;
Never quits
Throwin' fits
All the night
Till it's light;
No beseechin'
Stops its screechin';
Filin' saws,
Grindin' jaws,
Windin' clocks,
Gratin' locks—
'S music 'side
That 'ar snide!

Change yer toon, yew
Mis'bel loon, yew!

Mos'ly threes;
Shift it, *please!*

"She did!
She hid
Her lid,
She did!"

Now 'e's say'n'
Threes again:

"Yes she did,
Yes she did,
Yes she, yes she,
Yes she did!"

Gosh a' mity,
I'm mos' flighty.

Insect ass,
Scrapin' brass,
Co'se I know
She done so.
Now yew kill her.
(Hang this piller!)

Thar, thet's better;
Hope yew've let 'er
Die the death;
Save yer breath,
Mornin's here,
Breakfas' near.

* * * * *

Durn 'er hide,
Katy's died!

XIII

Bill's Vote

(November, 1916)

I AST Bill lately how 'e's goin ter vote.
We stood thar in the feed lot handin' out
Ter gruntin' Durocs ears o' yeller corn.
Bill kep' 'is mouth shet longer 'n I could wait,
An' so I ast again: "Yo' ain't decided?"
He looked right smart like he was goin' ter laff,
But didn't, tho' a smile loafed 'round 'is eyes.
"It's kind o' mixy, true 's yew live," he sez,
A-pokin' with 'is boot a big fat sow
(Who'd swiped a ear from one the little runts)
Until she squealed an' cussed at 'im in what
Bill calls Hog Latin, ran a rod, an' sulked
Fi' seconds, then snook back ter snitch some more—
"Yer caint tell nothin' 'bout a feller's vote
This year. Take ol' Doc Garner—demicrat
Sence 'sixty-nine, but sez he's goin' ter vote
Agin th' administration 'cos he jes'
Caint stand fer no ameeba (mebbe yew
Know what thet is) fer president. An' then
Thar's Peleg Towle 'at runs the paper here—
Oak-ribbed republican sence I dunno—
He sez we'd orter be almity glad
We ain't ter war, an' he do' want no ice-berg
A-settin' on no Congress' back door steps
A-try'n' ter hatch no batch o' tory laws!

Wal, thar ye be; it's julluk thet all 'round;
A feller's looks don't give away 'is vote.
I uster guess yer polytics by how
Ye spoke an' acted, but I caint this year."
"I sure don't git yoors, Bill, from ennything
I've heerd ye say all Fall," I sez; "How 'bout it?"
An' then 'e come ri't out: "I s'pose I might's
Well tell ye how it is. Yew know I come
From down Mizzoura way. My Paw's relidjun
Was votin' demicratic ev'ry chanct
He got, an' never nothin' else. I reck'n
I kind o' got thet feel myself, an' no
Amount o' reason 'pears ter knock it out.
I've heerd the argyments from A to Izzard,
An' reely, I'll admit I ain't no use
Fer empty words an' hifalutin' guff
'Bout war prosperity, humanity,
An' stuff like thet, an' layin' down like pups
When some one hollers loud an' suddin like.
But when I think o' Paw, an' Colonel Sims,
An' all them early days at Gravel Point—
Wal, I'm *agin* what I am *for*, that's all!
I'll give ye now my reelest reason why
I'm votin' demicratic come next week.
I ain't no pessimist, but I beleeve
This here U. S. hez got ter git ri' down
Ter brass tacks soon or late. We gotta hev
A awful mess o' trubble, go thru fire
An' brimstun, hell, an' purgatory 'fore
We'll ever 'mount ter shucks; an' I b'en thinkin'
The quickest way ter git us thar 's ter vote
The way I'm goin' ter."

XIV

Bill's "Risin' "

ONE mornin' Bill he took 'is chair at table,
'N' I seen 'is right hand almos' kivered
With bandages, an' 'e wan't scassly able
Ter eat—jes' set an' kind o' shivered.

I didn't say en'thing till I hed et
'Mos' threw my breakfas'; then I said,
"I reckin, Bill, yew better quit an' let
Us fix ye up, or go ter bed."

Thet hand o' his was awful red, an' swoll'd
Ez big 's a baby colt's hind legs;
The fingers on 't looked whitish blew an' cold,
An' stuck up like ol' harness pegs.

He suffered dretful, thet was plain enuff,
Tho' Laury 'd doctered 'im with messes,
An' polticed 'im with ev'ry kind o' stuff,
Horse linyments an' warm compresses.

But no, he wouldn't go ter bed; he 'd see
The dum thing threw 'f it took a week;
We might ez well, he said, jes' leeve 'im be,
He wouldn't show no yeller streak.

An' so he wandered 'round all day a-nussin'
Thet fest'rin' dead man's hand o' his;
He said it wan't no use ter dew no cussin'—
The more he swore the more it riz.

By night the pain hed drove 'im almos' wild,
'N' is arm was big's a water oak;
It wouldn't took much then ter git 'im riled,
Or skeer 'im stiff he's goin' ter croak.

But still he'd grin—tho' co'se I knowed he 's
fakin'—
An' say he didn't give a dam fer
A thing 'cept t' ev thet "risin' " quit its achin';
An' then he 'd sniff 't a bottl' o' camfer.

At last I sez, an' tapped 'im on the wrist,
"Ef I was yew I'd chuck fer fair
Them soaky puddin' rags, an' give yer fist
Jes' antyskeptick wash an' air."

Thet 's all I said, an' left 'im at 'is door
The mos' bedraggles' 'pearin' cuss,
Julluk a houn' dawg all chawed up an' sore,
'At looks he 's licked an' feels it wuss.

But on the quiet Bill 'e tried thet wash,
An' said nex' day the pain had eased
So much thet reely it felt *good*, buggosh,
Like some ol' wheel thet 's jes' be'n greased.

I never seen a man more chipperer;
'T was plain he 'd busted thet thar "risin'";
An' then, jessif he 'd be'n the minister,
He started in a-moralizin':

" It 's ruther cu'r'us, aint it, how a fuller
Jes' natchelly falls back on notions
Thet long ago he 'd orter t'run down suller;
I mean them poltices an' lotions.

Now I was raised ter b'leeve I 'd gotta take
My med'cin, grin an' bear it, when
Dizease or death, misfortune, pain or ache
Ketched holt, fer thet 's the way o' men;

An' thet is mos'ly trew; but here in farmin'
I find ye don't git ha'f so leery
'Bout buckin' fate, 'f ye'r' ont' them funny
varmin
They call 'basilly' or 'backteery.'

I hev an idee 't out o' life we 'd git
Much more o' honey 'n' less o' wax,
Ef we depended less on native wit
An' more on sientifick fac's."

XV

Calamitous Days

IT seems ter be the human lot o' man
Onct in a while ter hev a day
When ev'rything goes wrong, an' nary plan
Works out at all in enny way.

It's sure the stranges' thing how succumstances
At times combines ter git yer goat;
When grinnin' Fate jes' mocks at ye, an' dances
'Ter jangled fiddlin' on one note.

Wal, thet's how 'twas the time Bill hed 'is "risin';"
'Peared like the farm was on the blink;
An' I kin tell ye 't wouldn't be'n supprisin'
Ef even Bill hed took ter drink.

It come right at the bizzy season; Bill
Was all laid up an' couldn't work;
An' when he wan't around, ez co'se they will,
The help would soljer, loaf an' shirk.

They'd be'n so slow 'bout gittin' in the corn
On "Thirty-one"—the "Lower bottom"—
Thet when 'twas drown'd an' scorched, I could 'a' sworn
Thet Bill was mad enuff ter shot 'em.

An' then we found 't th' alfalfy 'n' wheat hed heaved
So bad thet most of it would die;
With wheat a dollar ninety Bill was peeved,
An' 'taint no job ter figger why.

An' next the forty west in alsike clover,
A field thet's purty gin'ly dry,
A heavy rain hed kivered almos' over
With water two three inches high.

Soon after Lon come in an' sez ter me:
"Yew better tell Paw 'bout the rape;
It's daid or ain't come up; I reckon he
Do' know it's in sech awful shape."

He did tho', 'n' when I told 'im, give a grunt,
An' looked it 'stid o' sayin' it.
Bill's mity strong on puttin' up a front;
He seldom r'ars an' champs 'is bit.

The garden truck was et by Willie's pony;
Ol' Jess got drunk on apple-jack;
The poults begun ter droop, an' acted phony;
An' Barney's glanders all come back.

I reck'n 'twas Willie 't throwed them kittens int'
The sistern, so 't we all took sick.
(I seen Bill's face was like a chunk o' flint
Ez 'e chased Willie down t' the crick!)

The telephone was crazy—jes' made clicks;
The flies was thicker 'n 'Gypshun plaigs;
The kitchen door was off an' wouldn't fix,
An' suthin' sucked all Laury's aigs.

Then pink-eye ketched the heffers an' the ca'ves,
An' some the critters lost the'r sight;
Fer fear yew'll think thet things was goin' by ha'ves,
The lightnin' hit the barn one night

An' burnt it clean ter blazes, 'long with ten
Or twenty ton o' hay an' straw,
An' knocked the stuffin' out o' "Herford Ben,"
Whose peddygree was long 's the law.

With Sunday come a quiet restin' spell;
We needed it, by Jethro, tew,
Fer scorchy weather 'n' rotten luck is hell
On fellers try'n' ter "see it threw,"

Ez Bill is allers sayin'; them's 'is words
When things is wrong an' nothin' 's right;
When Fortune's milk jes' turns ter whey an' curds,
An' spiles yer spir't-yel appetite.

The fambly 'd went ter church—ter hear 'bout Moses
An' how 'e fit all kinds o' luck;
While me an' Bill jes' lolled an' dug our noses
Deep int' the fresh green grass an' muck.

I sez, "Bill, yew remind me some o' Job,
Fer yew aint cussed the fates an' quit,
Like lots o' fellers would on this 'ere globe;
I sh' think yew'd cause enuff fer it."

He ups an' sez, not ans'rin' me direc'
  But far away, 'z 'e sometimes done:
"Nothin' 's wuth while onless ye resk yer neck—
  Ter shoot a owl by day 's no fun—

Ter raise a mess o' beef 's a reel man's job—
  'T 's a bully gamble growin' fodder—
Caint git no corn 'ithout ye take the cob—
  Alfalfy 'll allers hev its dodder—"

XVI

The Pet Calf

HEY, Whitey, here's a good fat ear,
  It's 'mong the last ye'll git;
Come on now, lemme rub yer nose—
  Ye'r' lookin' tol' bul fit.

I'm gonna ship ye off terday,
  Yew be'n here long enuff;
I s'pose 'f yew knowed what I'm a-sayin'
  Yew'd think 'twas kind o' ruff

Same's I dew, 'n' I'm a-tryin' hard
  Ter make ye onderstand;
Tho' p'r'aps it's jest ez well ye don't—
  Hi-i-i! What ye doin' t' my hand!

I've nussed ye sence ye fust was dropped—
  Ye don't remember, dew ye?
I've heerd ye blat a many times
  An' come a-runnin' tew ye.

Yew didn't hev yer mother long—
  I went t' the crick ter fetch 'er—
"Four Mile" was up, an' I's afraid
  The flood might prob'ly ketch 'er.

It hed, fer when she'd tried ter cross
Ter yew on t'other bank,
She got all tangled in the drift,
Drownded right thar, an' sank.

I brung ye up t' the house, 'n' the gals
They cosseted an' fed ye,
An' ever sence they's be'n some one
Ter fetch ye slops an' bed ye.

An' now look at ye! Ha'f a ton
O' helpless bone an' beef;
A livin' stack o' hay an' grain;
A critter boun' fer grief.

I dassent tell the gals ye'r' goin'—
I couldn't, gosh a'mity;
They'll miss ye tur'bul—fer a spell—
An' bawl for "little Whitey."

* * * * * * *

Thar's Lon—he's come ter round ye up.
Goo' by, ol' chap—O darn!
They's suthin' 't I hev clean fergot—
I reck'n I'll gw'int' the barn.

XVII

Bill on War

(February, 1917)

MY Land, 'twas cold thet night I set with Bill
Around the iron stove het up red hot
An' Bill a-stokin' on't with all 'is mite.
He calls the room 'is "offis;" three four cheers,
A bench, farm jurnels layin' on a stand,
Some books on cattle-feedin'—Bill's he's up
Ter date on all thet stuff, tho' he aint hed
No the'ry trainin' in them farmin' schools—
A book on "Soils"—the same ez siles, I s'pose—
A walnut seckertry, some plants o' Laury's,
A lot o' calendars—with smartish women
In droopy longish gowns a-ridin' proud
High-sperr'ted colts along a river whar
A chap is ketchin' traouts ez fast ez he
Kin sling a worm, or mebbe it's a fly—
An' Bill's ol' double bar'l behind the door.
I've offen gassed with Bill in thet thar room
O' his when fokes was all a-bed 'n' asleep.
The frost was thicker'n cream on all the winders;
Occazh'nully they'd be a pane 'thout none,
Or kivered only ha'f, an' 'f I looked out,
Ez onct or twict I done, I seen a sight
Thet made me clean fergit how cold it was:
A sea o' white 'way down ter "Thirty-One,"
With waves o' drifts piled ev'ry here an' thar;
An' *still*—Jerushy! Still's a mounting top

Up thar amongst them craters on the moon.
The only noise we heerd inside, 'cept co'se
The fire, was snappin' clabboards on the house,
Like pistol shots thet kind o' made us jump.
"It's twenty-six below," sez Bill, ez he
Throwed on another mess o' coal; "I reck'n
We'll need them extry quilts ternight. I'm glad
It's be'n a-snowin' some on thet 'ar field
O' wheat this week; they wouldn't be no crop
This spring if 't hedn't. Caint remember when
It's ever be'n so cold afore here'bouts.
Reck'n Laury's plants 'll hev ter be brung up
A leetle closter ter the stove; thet thar
Jerainyum looks jessif 'twas fros' bit now.
Yew look like yew was tew," he sez, an' grinned.
"I be," I sez, "behind, but barbecued
In front."

An' then I mentioned cazhool like
The war a-hangin' ov'r us. Bill kep' still
At first, 'n' I let 'im; then bimeby, julluk
He's talkin' tew 'isself, he sez reel grave,
"Ef't comes, 'twill be the genooinest war
Our fokes hez ever saw; an' we're about
Ez ready for't 'z a fat prize Berksheer barrer
Would be ter fight a bunch o' timber wolves.
O' co'se this here U. S. hez got back-bone,
But 'pears ter me it's—what's thet word? I seen
It t'other day an' looked it up—O yes,
It's *atrofide*. . . We gotta train ri' down
Ter razor-backs afore we're enny good . . .
We're all tew pussy 'n' prizey 'n' prosp'rus like
Ter tech a wil'cat even with a fork. . . .
'F a hoss hez won blue ribbons to a fair,
He prob'ly caint kick ha'f so *long* 'z a scrub

Thet's hard ez nails an' workin' ev'ry day. . . .
An' then agin I think we're like "Ol' Ben";
Yew 'member him—ez gentle ez a kitten,
An' big an' fat, good-natured, easy goin',
Tho' onct 'n a while they's fire in 'is eye.
They want no doubt thet he could lick 'is weight
Twict over, but he never knowed it till—
Yew prob'ly don't recall the time thet young
An' fi'ry furrin bull o' Otto's bust
Clean threw three fences jes' ter hev a crack
At Ben. I didn't git thar till 'twas over,
But heerd consid'bul 'bout it from the naybers.
They said the younger critter kind o' toyed
With Ben a spell, an' Ben was sort o' dazed,
But kep' a-goin' not scassly knowin' what
'Twas all about; then later he got sore,
'Is dander an' 'is blood come up, an' say—
The way he whaled thet hateful little cuss. . .
It took 'im all day tew, an' not a soul
Dast git up clost ter watch 'em fight it out. . .
Ol' Ben was stannin' kind o' groggy when
I come ter git 'im, 'n' ev'ry little while
He'd stop an' paw an' beller 'n' lick 'is flank
Like he'd be'n hit right smart; but he was all
Right thar, 'n' I hed ter laff. . . . They
brung a pair
O' hosses up an' hauled the other beast
Somew'eres. . . We never hed no better bull
Then Ben was after thet; he wouldn't look
Fer trubble, an' somehow 'r 'nother trubble
seemed
Ter not be look'n' fer him. It done 'im good,
We thought, an' thet's my *i*dee 'bout this war."
"But how 'bout Lon," I sez, "ef war should come?"

Thet ketched 'im hard, an' I was sorry 't I
Hed ast 'im sich a techy question, 'cos
I knowed thet Lon was all they was ter go,
Bill's bigges' boy—the rest was either gals
Or els tew young—an' Bill was allers jellus
O' Lon, like heffers be with their firs' ca'f.
I changed the subjec', said how cold it was,
An' stomped aroun,' an' 'lowed I'd go ter bed.
I said "good-night" an' got ha'f way up stairs,
When Bill he give a little cough behind
An' blowed 'is nose, 'n' 'is words was drowndy like:
"*I'd see 't he went.*" An' then a gust o' wind
Put out my light, 'n' I thought how lucky 'twas,
Altho' I never would 'a' looked at Bill
When he was that 'a' way.

XVIII

Treed

'TWAS a Sunday in March ez we set on a log
In a break in the woods, whar the crick
makes a jog,
An' hez et int' the bank an' up under the mill,
Thet the story herewith was related by Bill.

"Years ago, forty odd, wild hogs was ez thick
In these 'ere Skillet bottoms ez 'cats' in the crick.
They follered the mast (tho' I ain't meanin'
shippin'),
An' 'long in the Fall got ez fat ez a pippin.

My Paw uster hunt 'em with dawgs on the run,
So 'z ter git us our pork 'fore the Winter begun;
An' many's the time I've heerd 'im tell how
He hed fit with or run from a perky ol' sow.

Fer them pigs was mean custumers, give 'em a
chance,
An' a boar with 'is tushes could rip up yer pants
A dum sight more quicker 'n a pirate crew,
An' 'e'd take a hull lot o' yer leg with it tew.

One time they's a feller was huntin' 'is pork
Somewhar over yender not fur from the Fork.
Now they's fokes 'at's still livin' 'at 'll tell ye they
know
Thet what I'm a-tellin' ye reely was so.

Wal, night come along an' 'e hedn't shot nuthin',
An' 'e got kind o' scary an' tho't 'e heerd suthin';
So 'e turned an' 'e run like a stampeded steer
Till 'is breathin' give out an' 'is legs felt queer.

They was only one thing fer the poor cuss ter dew,
An thet was ter shin up a tree by the 'slew'
Whar 'e happened ter be; an' thet's what 'e done
When 'e'd got 'is wind back an' hed throwed down
'is gun.

He grabbed a young hick'ry with both han's an'
feet,
An' 'e clumb an' 'e clumb till 'e found a good seat.
Thar 'e rested a hour a-huggin' the tree
Till at last 'e decided 'twas safe ter work free.

But 'e couldn't giddown—stuck right whar 'e was
A-wond'rin' wottell 's ailin' graverty's laws!
He shoved an' 'e squeezed an' 'e sweat with a will,
An' 'is legs was woun' tight round thet hickory,
till—

Dog tater my black cat's kittens!—he found
He hed be'n settin' thar all the while on the
ground!"

XIX

Bill on Tobacco

I LIT my pipe, an' set with Bill a spell
Out on the porch. The sun hed jes' went down;
The hens an' chickens, 'thout no 'parent aim,
Was gravitatin' towards the hen-house door;
The poults was floppin' int' the apple tree,
An' Zony come acrost the dewy yard
A-bringin' in the evenin' mess o' milk.
'Twas peaceful like, an' I was tuckered out,
An' thet thar corn-cob tasted pow'ful good.
I hedn't hed a smoke sence noon, an' co'se
I'd be'n a-cravin' on't sence supper's over,
An' kind o' grudged ter hev ter gwout an' feed
The colts 'fore settin' down an' lightin' up.
But now the work was done, an' thar I was
Ez comf'tabul an' ca'm ez I could be,
Suckin' an' blowin' great big gobs o' smoke,
An' strangulatin' three four hundred flies
Thet got the'rsel's all settled fer the night.
Bill picked 'is teeth ez quiet ez a lamb,
An' didn't make no sound, 'cept 'cazhnully,
When one my puffs would veer agin 'is face,
He'd cough an' bresh the smoke off with 'is hand.
I'd never saw Bill smoke, or chaw, or "dip,"
Sence I hed knowed 'im, tho' I'd offen wondered
Jes' why it was thet he denied hisself
About the bigges' comfort they is goin'.
I blowed a bunch o' smoke rings threw the screen,

An' watched 'em melt away in bluish mist.
Then I inhaled, an' filled my chist up full
Till I could feel the nickerteen soak in
Clean to my toes, an' brace me up all over.
I fairly wallered in thet smoke, by jing!
At last—'twas gittin' right smart darkish, 'n' we
Could hear the snipe a-callin' in the fiel',
An' all the western sky was brownish pink—
Bill ups an' sez—an' I could see 'is grin—
" 'Pears like y'er' gittin' sight o' comfort out
O' thet thar shag, an' I aint blamin' on ye,
Tho' onct 'n a while it sort o' turns my stummick.
What is't, '*Farmer's Delight*'?" "Nope, '*Dago's Joy*' ",
I sez, a-rammin' in another charge.
I got it goin', an' after while he sez:
"Looks like it might be; 'f yew kin smoke thet stuff,
I reckin yew're a smoker, an' would stand
Fer ennything from burdock ter hoss-redish,
Or tan-bark, blacksmith's parin's, stable sweepin's,
An' sich like stuff they put in them thar kind
O' boxes 't yew got thar." "Aw, quit yer josh,"
I sez, "I've smoked all them one time or 'nother,
An' know the diff'runce. This 'ere smoke is reel
Terbacker; guess I know." "Terbacker nuthin' ",
Sez 'e; "smells more ter me like some ol' buf'-
Lo robe hed ketched afire." An' then 'e laffed.
Ef ennybody else but Bill hed poked
Thet kind o' fun at me, I might o' got
A leetle riled; but somehow 'r 'nuther 'taint
No use ter let yerself git hot around
Yer neck when Bill throws in his leetle hooks.

Yew *hev* ter laff in spite o' ev'ry thing.
An' so I cooled ri' down an' sez reel quiet:
"Ef yew knowed ennything about terbacker,
Ef yew's a smoker, 'n' hed the feelin' on 't,
Yew'd quit remarkin' things like that 'a' one.
I bet yew never even smoked corn-silk,
Rattan, hay-seed, sweet fern, an' baby stuff
Like that, thet cubs begins on when they're smart.
I tell ye yew do' know nuthin' about it."
I tho't I'd fixed 'im, fer a spell at least,
Fer 'e kep' still, an' hummed reflective like.
Bimeby he went 't the door an' hawked an' spit.
Come back, an' set, an' coughed—fer I hed puffed
A lot o' smoke right towards 'is empty cheer—
An' kind o' choky sez: "I s'pose yew think
Yew've sized me up correc'. I'll tell ye suthin':
Yew do' know no more 'n nuthin' what yer sayin';
A rabbit knows more 'bout terbacker 'n yew
Compared ter me." "W'y, Bill, I never seen
Ye smoke," I sez, "nor chaw, in all these years."
"Wal, that don't mean," he sez, " 't I never did.
When I was a young feller, I begun
Ter smoke an' chaw like all the other han's,
Only I done it more 'n they did. I'd hev
Ter hev my chaw ez soon ez I was out
O' bed, an', 'cept at meals, I chawed all day
An' part the night, an' smoked the rest the time.
I've woke up many nights an' lit a pipe.
Ez time went on I kep' a-gittin' wuss.
Laury, she said my mouth was like a sewer
When 't wa'n't a fact'ry chimbley; an' I noticed
The things I et wa'n't relishin'; I couldn't
Tell pepper-grass from pie, or Woostersheer
From coffee; eatin' wa'n't no fun no more.

An' then I found I couldn't git terbacker
Nowheres near strong enough. I tried all kinds
From fine-cut down ter *Black Twist Nigger Head*,
A leetle mite o' which will make a hog
So sick he cain't eat nuthin' fer a week,
An' like enough he'll die. I give a mule
A piece onct, I remember, jes' fer fun,
The handiest feller with 'is heels we hed.
Say! Soon's the pizen got ter work inside,
Thet cuss begun ter ram around an' beller
Like he was givin' birth 't a pair o' twins,
A thing no or'nary mule aint s'posed ter dew.
An' then 'e up an' kicked the barn door out,
Le'pt over coupla gates an' started off
Like them thar Gadarenian swine yew've heerd
About in Scriptur'. Reck'n he's runnin' yit,
Leastways we never seen 'im ar'terwards.
Wal, I begun ter color up, until
I looked some 'ut like summer crook-necks dew
Dead-ripe in August. Appetite 'bout gone,
An' nervous ez a new-broke colt hitched up
Ter plow. An' still I chawed an' smoked an' chawed,
An' couldn't seem ter git enough. *Black Twist*
Ter me was like a peece o' straw ter yew.
I scoured the kentry stores; the strongest brands
Would satisfy no more 'n molasses would.
O' co'se yew understand I wa'n't no *slave*
Ter thet thar weed; I only *hed* ter *hev* it,
That's all. (They's fokes 'at thinks they ain't no diff'runce
Atween them two idees; *we* know they is.)
One day a pedlar come along, an' Laury
She bought a coupla packages o' pills

'T the feller said was 'guaranteed' ter knock
Terbacker habits higher 'n wheat, an' cure
The most 'invertebrate'—or some sich word—
Terbacker user in the world. She kep'
It dark, an' fed them pellets on the sly
Ter me in stuff I et. But 'twa'n't no use;
I kep' on chawin' more an' more. It might
'A' made some diff'runce, p'raps, ef I hed knowed
What she was up tew. Ginally yew hev
Ter *know* about sich things ter hev 'em dew
Ye enny good at all.
Wal, things was thet
'A' way when yew fust come. Yew 'member when
I met ye up 't the deepo yew was smokin'
Thet thar same shag stuff yew're a-smokin' now;
I ketched a whiff or tew—I never told
Ye 'bout it 'fore—but 'twas enough; it done
What nuthin' else hed done fur thirty year.
I haint bit off a single chaw sence that,
Or smoked a whiff, so help me Moses Pratt!"

When I'd collected all my senses back,
Bill he hed slid away an' gone ter bed.

XX

The New Year's Turkey

WE all hed come ter Bill's ter spend the day,
New Year's it was, an' Bill hed shaved, an iled
'Is hair, an' greased 'is boots, an' looked ez gay
'Z a feller kin in clo'es thet ain't be'n siled.

"I reck'n I didn't tell ye 'bout this fowl,"
He sez, an' stopped 'is carvin' fer a bit,
While Laury looked ez if she's goin' ter scowl,
An' tried by signs ter steer 'im off of it.

"This feller didn't seem ter hev no sex;
Ha'f hen, ha'f Tom he was; he'd go a-whangin'
Like Toms do, tails spread, wings a-draggin', necks
All druggled up, an' great red beads a-hangin';

"An' then they's other times he'd sneak away
Hen fashun like, scratch up a nest, an' set,
Tho' them kind cain't lay aigs, ye know—whad say?"—
He seen thet Laury 'peared ter be 'n a sweat

Ter hev 'im quit 'is talk an' go on carvin'.
He done a leg an' wing, an' sliced the breast,
An' got the stuffin' ready fer the sarvin',
An' then begun again: "I found 'is nest

"Las' June—we'd missed 'im fer a month or so—
Off in a ol' forsooken suller; thar
'E set ez thin 's a rail. Bet yew dunno
What he'd be'n settin' on so long, by tar!"

"Will, won't ye hurry up? The fokes is waitin', "
An' then she tried ter start a line o' talk.
But 't want no use; Bill sez: "Ez I was statin',
Each time we'd try ter shoo 'im off he'd balk,

"An' wouldn't stir; then I felt under 'im,
Reel careful like, an' say, yew wouldn't b'leeve it,
But"—Laury now was lookin' kind o' grim,
An' told 'im t' either carve thet bird or leave it.

But Bill kep' on regardless: "Next I see
O' him he's leadin' round a yeller goslin'!
(We et it Chris'mas day).—Now what gits me,
An' sets my wits ter bilin' an' a sozzlin,'

"Is how the cuss from *this* could hatch a goose!"
An' Bill held up a smooth, worn, chiny knob,
Thet from some door hed long sence broken loose.
"That's what I took from under this ol' squab!"

"A Happy New Year, Bill," I sez; "D'ye mind
'F I ast ye fer thet 'Pope's Nose' thing behind?"

XXI

The Picture

A PITCHUR of a feller hangin' up
In thet 'ar little room o' mine at Bill's
Hez offen set my wond'rin' works ter goin'.
He's stannin' on a stun verandy like,
A oldish sort o' man with streaky hair,
Up high whar 'e kin see some ways away,
'N' 'is clo'es is suthin' like the ones I seen
In Bill's 'lustrated fambly Bible, hung
All over 'im in drapish kind o' folds,
An' jes' some in-soles fassen'd on 'is feet
With funny strings a-runnin' threw 'is toes.
They's trees an' scen'ry out in front, green fiel's,
A rollin' hill or so, a crick, a bunch
O' little houses whar they's fokes at work,
An' things looks peeceful, like they do here'bouts
In this 'ere Skillet deestric' in Jooly.
But back o' all them things yew seem ter see
A wall o' clouds a-fencin' on 'em in,
An' yew cain't tell 'f they's mount'ins, sea, or what
A-layin' off behind, it's all so dim.
Afore I've blowed the light out menny nights
I've looked at thet thar chap, an' almos' tho't
I knowed what he was sensin', 'cos I seen
T' 'e hed a far-off look, an' sort o' scrunched
'Is shoulders 'zif 'e'd clean fergot hisself.
One night in early Joon Bill come t' my room
Ez I was goin' ter bed, 'n' I ast 'im, "Bill,"

I sez, "thet feller up thar gits me goin';
Yew got a idee what 'e's thinkin'? 'Pears
Ter me he's fig'rin' what it's all about,
Same 's me an' yew does sometimes when we're 'lone."
Bill 'lows 'e ain't no pote, but fust I knowed
He ups an' gits the foll'rin' off 'is chist,
An' damfino 'f 'e made it up hisself,
Or got it some'r's outen readin' books:

"I'm speckerlatin' on the drift
O' things I gotta face.
Mos' ginally they ain't no rift
In all them clouds o' space
Thet seems ter narrer in my view
An' shet the sky from me an' yew.

"They was one onct tho'—when I's young,
An' never dreamt o' trouble,
Jes' whissled, hollered, played, an' sung,
Nor knowed the hay from stubble.
What was it ripped them clouds apart,
An' let the light shine on my heart?

"The kids they do' know what it means
Thet ray thet perkles threw,
An' makes 'em reely kings an' queens,
Like I was onct an' yew.
But ain't it great ter feel thet way,
An' not know hearts mus' break some day!"

He quit, an' then went on: "I reck'n yew might's
Well cut them thissels out termorrer south
The barn. Goo' night." An' never changed 'is voice.

XXII

The Letter from Lon

I.

I never seen a man more prouder 'n Bill
The mornin' Lon's first letter come from France.
He'd et 'is breakfas' an' was harnessin',
An' I stood at the trough a-wat'rin' Babe,
When 'Viny come a-runnin' from the road
A-wavin' suthin' white an' screamin' like
She'd be'n attackted by a bunch o' bees.
Co'se Laury heerd 'er bawlin', dropped a pie
Ri't on the houn' dawg layin' by the door,
An' started like a rabbit fer the yard.
The houn' was scairt an' come a-bell'rin' out
All plastered up with messy strawb'ry dough;
The hens an' geese an' ducks got ri't on aidge
An' nigh screeched all the'r haids off ez they run
In ev'ry which way, 'n' yew'd 'a' tho't the hull
Dum works was bust. But Bill he only grinned;
He knowed what 'Viny hed, fer he hed heerd
The pos'man's car come chuggin' up an' stop
To our front gate. (Bill didn't hev ter look,
Fer he kin sense by lis'nen' ev'ry car
Thet goes by reg'lar—knows 'em by the'r rattle.)
" . . . D'ye notice, Laury, 'pears ter me like
this
Envelop 's be'n a-monkeyed with somehow;
They's suthin' plastered over it that sez—"
An' then 'e eyed it closter, spellin' out
The letters 'e hed cut threw with 'is 'nife.

When Laury heerd the words she fired ri't up;
"Now who'd ye s'pose would be so mean ez thet!
He dassent give 'is reel name 'cos 'e's 'feerd
He'd git suppeenylized fer tamperin'
With other fokeses letters; so 'e ups
An' calls hisself thet or'n'ry Sensure thing!
Caint see no sense ter thet; tho' p'r'aps yew kin."
She laffed one them thar cuttin' laffs o' her'n,
An' sez ter Bill she's gotta hurry back
T'the house an' 'tend t' some rewbarb she had left
A-stewin' on the stove, an' will 'e fetch
The letter in ez soon 's 'e's threw, an' leeve
It lay whar she kin find it on her burer.
'Fore Bill could ans'er she was runnin' up
The kitchin steps, an we could hear 'er tell
The houn' dawg what a newsunce he hed be'n
Ter muss the floor all up with strawb'ry pie.

II.

Bill set a minnit quiet-like, an' then
Begun t' onfold the letter. Sich a mess
O' scraps, an' holes, an' long black blots an' things
Yew never seen. I couldn't hardly keep
From snik'rin'. Bill smiled tew, an' 'lowed it must
'A' took more time an' trubble tew unwrite
The letter 'n' 't did ter write it. Then 'e read,
'Thout skippin' nuthin' 'cept the blots and cuts:
"Deer Paw: Wal, here we be at (blank), 'n' I got
Yoor letter 'n' Maw's, 'n' I sure was mity glad
Ter hear thet yew all 's well an' gittin' 'long
Fust rate. Us boys is all a-feelin' fine,
An' say, we're goin' ter stick ter this 'ere job
Till some of us at enny rate sees thet
Ol' Potsdam Crocodile throw up the spunge. . ."

(Thet's Bill hisself all over 'gin, thinks I;
Them Anjelo-Saxtons jes' don't never quit.
Bill's grate-grate-grampaw come from Summerset
Some years 'fore Jorge the IIIst. was kingin' it
An' riled us so 't we hed ter revolute.)
Bill mumbled on a spell, but said they wa'n't
No sense in't 'cos' so much hed be'n chopped out.
"I jedge," he sez, "it's places they come threw,
An' ossifers he seen, an' whar they're goin,'
An' sich." Then he begun again: "They's days,
Paw, when I git ter thinkin' 'bout the farm,
Ol' Whitey, Ben, the wood-lot whar me 'n' yew
Cu' down the bee tree Fall 'fore last an' got
A ri't smart mess o' honey; 'simmon trees,
Sunsets from our back porch, the furrers I
Hev cut with our ol' walkin' plow—Oh Paw,
Yew git me, don't ye!—then I come ri't back
An' look acrost ter whar them Boshes be,
An' think o' all the things they done an' still
Ar' doin' ter make this airth a mizzery,
Mad, desp'rit things drove on by them ez knows
They're in daid 'rong but never'll give a dam
'Bout lyin', killin'—then I know my job,
'N' I'm glad I'm here, 'n' I know yew be—"
Bill run
T' the crib nigh whar we was, said he'd fergot
Suthin,' 'n' I knowed 'e never would come back.
I jes' set thar an' couldn't move. He tho't
I must 'a' gone an' couldn't hear; I did
Tho'—God, how I did leg it out o' thar!
I went an' watered all the hogs fi' times;
'F' they tasted salt in what they drunk, I know
Whar't come from. 'N' all thet day I kep' a-
sayin:
"Them Anjelo-Saxtons jes' don't never quit!"

XXIII

The Drouth

BUGGOSH I never seen it dryer 'n 'tis
Ri't now down this 'ere Skillet way;
It's scassly rained a drop sence 'long in Joon,
An' gittin' dryer every day.
We got our corn in early 'n May, an' seen
It mos'ly drownded out, an' then
We planted it onct more an' watched it grow
An' stick out spiky leaves again.
A little later Bill 'e sez ter me
In one them joky little talks:
"We'll hev ter git a ladder when Fall comes
Ter reach the ears on them thar stalks."
It shorely looked like that 'a' way ontil
The drouth begun ter hit us hard,
An' fennel, hog-weed, pusly, dock an' sich,
An' even plantain in the yard—
The sort o' stuff ye jes' cain't kill 'f ye try—
Was withered wisps o' nothin' 't all.
Ez time went on 'twas suthin' pretty fierce:
Pitch sizzled on the hoss barn wall;
The road was jest a streak o' smoky dust,
An' every time a lizzie passed
The awf'lest clouds come rollin' int' the house,
An' made us feel like bein' gassed;
"Four Mile" was dry 's a sermon, caked an' cracked
'Cept here an' thar a scummy pool,

An' even in the deepest woods 'twas hot
An' gaspy, stiflin', never cool;
The wallers all dried out, an' flies was thick
An' noisy ez a swarm o' bees;
The cistern water got so brown an' warm
Ter drink it meant ter drink diseese;
An' all our corn—wal, git it straight—the corn
Was like ol' Zekel's dream long sence,
A valley full o' rattlin' skelertons
Thet made ye skeered ter cross the fence!

"D'yew know what them thar sperrits sez?" ast Bill
One moonlight night ez we was lookin'
At thet poor "fired" crop o' ghosts without
No reel intent o' goin' a-spookin'.
"No, tell me, Bill," I sez, an' shivered some.
"Wal, this tall yaller stalk ri't here
He sez the dice was loaded from the start,
Thet ol' Ma Nacher holds life dear
Jest ez a whole; thet individyools aint
No more account then knot-holes is.
We plug ter drink o' life ez deep 's we kin,
But what we git is mos'ly fizz."

* * * * *

"I reck'n they want us up 't the house," I sez,
The hair a-risin' from my neck,
F'r I'd saw thet stalk wave all its arms an' nod,
An' knowed Bill hed the dope correc.'

XXIV

The Labor Situation

"DON'T hardly seem fair," said Bill with a hitch
Tew his gallus—the other was busted—
,'Fer the papers an' all, the public an' sich"—
An' I seen he was kind o' disgusted—

"Ter praise up the workers ter home an' not fitin'
An' gittin' all kinds o' big pay,
An' 'en strikin' fer more—*Whoa thar! Quit yer bitin'!*"—
He was combin' an breshin' ol' Gray—

"When the boys 'over thar' give up all thet they hed
Ter fite fer thirty bones per"—
An' I couldn't ezzac'ly tell what 'e nex' said,
Fer 'is comb hed ketched in a burr.

XXV

"Killed in Action: Corporal Alonzo—"

The day 'fore thet thar awful telegram
From Washin'ton fer Bill was brung t' the house
By Viny—she'd be'n up ter town; an' Gene
The operater, lookin' kind o' white
Hed handed her the yeller envelope
An' sez: "It's jes' some bizness fer yer Paw"——
Me 'n' Bill was talkin' 'bout the Lib'ty bonds.
We'd thrashed the matter over, 'n' both agreed
The only thing ter dew, 'f a feller hed
The price, was git a bond, an' ef 'e hedn't,
Ter git one ennyhow; an' thet's how 'twas.
Bill he'd suscribed with Charlie Buck, who runs
The Farmers' Gild (an' nuthin' much besides),
While I'd went up ter Sims' an' teched a chap
I knowed fer five, an' trusted Proverdunce
Ter see me threw. (Bill sez thet Proverdunce
Is mos'ly what ye dew yerself, with p'r'aps
A dash o' luck throwed in ter help along.)
Then come the stunnin' news. . . Things wa'n't
the same,
'N' I reckon never will be 'gain. The farm
Seemed empty like, 'n' I stopped good menny
times
Ter look whar Lon hed carved 'is 'nishuls on
A crib door slat . . . It give me 'n awful thump
Inside ter see how sort o' closter Bill
An' Laury was; she hed ter lean on him,

An'—God, I tell ye he was suthin' wuth
A-leanin' on, a human staff o' oak.
Yew 'member them blue little lakes or ponds—
Most ev'r'y country deestric' hez 'em—whar
Fokes sez they ain't no bottom tew 'em 't all,
Nobody never reeched it tho' they'd tried
Fer years an' years with ev'ry kind o' line?
Wal, thet's the way Bill's eyes looked at ye then:
Great dep's o' shinin' feelin,' purplish blue;
An' dogged ef I could tell which from the t'other
A father's greef, or father's pride.
At five
One mornin' not long arterwards, ez I
Was pitchin' silage down ter feed the steers,
I seen Bill ridin' out the yard on Belle.
He waved 'is hand an' yelled he'd be ri't back.
At bre'kfas' time he sez jes' cazhool like:
"I ketched thet 'ar Buck feller 'fore 'e's up,
An' taken out another Lib'ty bond.
'Pears like I gotta back them boys that's left
In France jes' twict ez strong now't Lon has went."

The Skillet Fork

XXVI

November

Sich a mornin' o' glory I've rar'ly saw,
  Tho' they tell me thet Winter is nigh;
The sun's fairly glary, an' hez a reel carry,
An' I'm swattin' a bothersome fly.

The sky was ez black ez one o' Bill's blots
  When over a letter he muddles;
An' the win' blow'd a blast, an' the rain fell fast,
  An' the groun' was a huddle o' puddles.

Thet was yistiddy, pard; but terday, by Joel,
  It's Aprul excep' fer the leaves;
They're a copper an' green with a pigeony sheen,
  An' a red like our Heryford beeves.

Mos' potes will all spring suthin' on ye 'bout russet,
  An' ox-blood, an' fawn, an' maroon;
But they never was here in the "yeller an' sere",
  An' reality aint in the'r toon.

I'll go further yit an' say thet the shades
  O' them colors I plainly kin see
Is ev'ry durn hue in the specktum but blue,
  An' mebby that's thar fer all me.

Co'se it's up in the sky whar ye'd reckon 't 'ud be,
  Sort o' balancin' up the whole;
Yew put 'em tergether in *this* kind o' weather
  An' it's eye-musick, pard, fer yer soul!

The glint o' the sun on our Fall wheat fiel's—
More em'raldy now then in May—
Is Nacher's own dope on thet undyin' hope
Thet keeps us a-pluggin' away.

They's a nawful sweet peece kind o' hangin' aroun'
An' it's great by this 'ere shock o' stover
Ter feel the ol' Earth all set fer re-birth
When the War an' the Winter is over.